A FORGOTTEN ABERDEENSHIRE MONASTERY

BY

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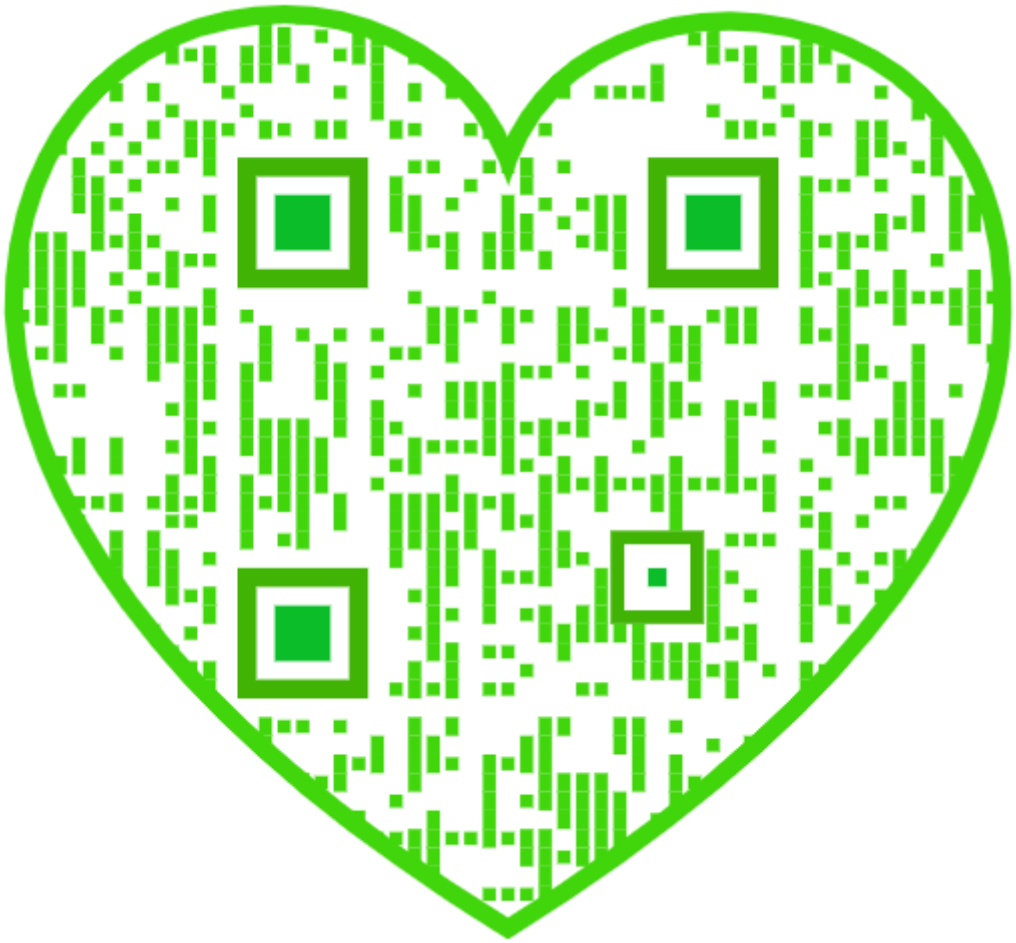

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To The Right Honourable
The Viscountess Cowdray
with the author's compliments
October 8th 1914.

A Forgotten Aberdeenshire Monastery.

OUR Celtic Christian sites in Aberdeenshire have usually been ascribed to St. Columba and his Scotic disciples from Iona, but recent research has shown that most if not all of them belong to a different source and may claim a higher antiquity. The whole question of the introduction of Christianity into Pictland has recently been exposed to searching investigation by the Rev. Archibald B. Scott, minister of Kildonan in Sutherland. Mr. Scott, in his book on the "Pictish Nation," and in his smaller work on "St. Ninian,"[1] has shown that much of the credit commonly awarded to Columba and the Scottish School of Iona, is really due to Ninian and his British missionaries from Strathclyde, who were actively spreading the Gospel in Aberdeenshire a full century and a half before Columba set foot on the pebbly beach of Iona. Ultimately, with the political ascendancy of the Scots over the Picts, the Scottish or Columban church absorbed its predecessor. While the Columban Church conformed early to Rome, the remnants of the native Pictish Church, founded from Strathclyde, continued dissidents to the last as the Culdees of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Hence all through the later Middle Ages the Roman Church writers systematically garbled the records of Celtic Christianity, ascribing to Columba and the Iona brethren much of the work which was in fact performed by Ninian and Kentigern and their disciples. Thus, to take one instance only, the famous Monastery at Deer in Buchan was believed in medieval times to have been founded by Columba, whereas in reality it was founded, a full generation before Columba even landed in Scotland, by one of Ninian's disciples, Colm, who also established churches at Oyne, Daviot, Birse, and Belhelvie, at each of which places he was afterwards confused or equated with Columba.

[1] "The Pictish Nation: its People and its Church," 1918; "St. Ninian, Apostle of the Britons and Picts," 1916.

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One of the most famous of these pre-Columban Missionaries in Aberdeenshire was St. Moluag (Molocus or Lugadius as he is called in the Latin records). Unlike most of our Celtic apostles, he did not come from Strathclyde, but from the great monastery at Bangor in Ulster: "Bangor of the hosts" as it was called, from the three thousand monks which it numbered in its greatest days. From this famous monastery, which founded colonies as far away as Switzerland and Lombardy, St. Moluag was sent into Pictland in 562, the year before Columba established his community at Iona. St. Moluag laboured in Argyll, Ross, and Banff, but he is pre-eminently associated with Aberdeenshire. Three of his churches are in the valley of the Dee—Tarland, Migvie, and Durris. Others are at Newmachar and Clatt. It is interesting to note that the famous Newton Stone at Insch may be a relic of his activities in Aberdeenshire, for a recent version of its mysterious inscription contains the name of Moluag.[1] If so, this stone is surely one of the most impressive memorials of the dawn of its recorded history which our county can boast. The great apostle of Aberdeenshire died while labouring in the Garioch on 25 June, 592, and was buried at his monastery of Rosemarkie in Ross-shire. His crozier, the Bachuill More, is still preserved, a remarkable relic of the early Celtic Church, in the hereditary guardianship of the Duke of Argyll. "It is a dull intelligence," Mr. Scott truly remarks, "which is not startled by the survival of this pastoral staff into the twentieth century." [2]

The most important of St. Moluag's foundations in Aberdeenshire was at Clova in Kildrummy. His choice of this locality for a missionary centre is amply justified by the earth houses and other evidences of a thriving prehistoric population with which this district is crowded. The site is a gentle eminence on the left bank of the Little Mill Burn, a small tributary of the Mossat which rises in Hill of John's Cairn. It is just east of Little Mill Smiddy and slightly over half a mile south of Clova House, or a mile south-west of the village of Lumsden. Near it is, or was, Simmerluak's (St. Moluag's) Well. Within a plantation may still be seen the rubble foundations of the parish Church of Cloveth, which in medieval times took the

[1] See "Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.," 1907-8, pp. 56-63; "Trans. Scot. Eccles. Soc.," 1911-12, Vol. III, Part III, p. 308.

[2] See "Trans. Scot. Eccles. Soc.," 1911-12, Vol. III, Part III, pp. 294-309; also Wilson, "Prehistoric Annals of Scotland," 2nd Ed., Vol. II, pp. 478-9, where the crozier is figured.

place of the old Celtic monastery. They indicate a building about 30 feet 8 inches long by 21 feet 4 inches broad exteriorly, oriented to north-east. The walls were apparently some 2 feet 8 inches thick: but as the whole south side of the building has been completely wrecked, and lies buried under a heap of stones, it is not possible to give very precise dimensions. One or two dressed slabs still lie about the site; and in the grounds of Clova House are preserved a number of fragments which show that the little church was not without architectural pretensions. These fragments comprise large portions of a square headed window with a splayed central mullion; several splayed rybats and lintels; a portion of the font; and one finely wrought stone with mouldings whose deep hollows and bold rolls seem to indicate a date in the thirteenth century. In Clova House are also preserved four remarkable stone crosses which were dug up in 1875 in the old churchyard. They are quite plain and roughly hewn, or rather hacked out, and may well be relics of the early Celtic monastery. All were found erect beneath the surface of the soil into which they had sunk, and associated with them were traces of interment. The Museum at Clova also contains a remarkable perforated bead in dark blue stone, veined in white, red, light blue, and green, which was found in 1876 under the north-west corner stone of the foundations of the ancient chapel.[1]

Standing on this very ancient and sacred site, is it not strange to think of it as the scene of a busy little Culdee community, where manuscripts were read and copied, and where schools were established to spread religion and civilization among the rude inhabitants of Kildrummy and Auchindoir, at a period when the adjoining earth houses may still have been inhabited, and when beacons blazed often on the vitrified fort at Tap o' Noth to give warning of approaching war? Still more remarkable is the reflexion that our remote district was witness of such godly labours at a period when in the west of Europe the Lombard hordes were pouring into that part of Italy to which they gave their name, and wresting the conquests of the great Justinian from the nerveless grasp of his successors; when at Rome Pope Gregory I was at the height of his power; when in the east the Empire was locked in that titanic struggle with Persia from which by the genius of Heraclius it emerged triumphant, only to be humbled

[1] I have to acknowledge the kindness of Capt. H. P. Lumsden of Clova in permitting access to the fragments of the old church and to the Museum at Clova House.

almost to the dust before the rival might of Islam; at a period, also, before St. Augustine had landed in the pagan wilds of Saxon Kent, and when St. Columba had barely commenced his great work among the Scotic immigrants of Dalriada.

We may readily picture our little community, with its group of wooden or wattle huts, its smithy, its barns and byres, its bakery, its kiln for corn-drying, and its little heather-thatched church of uncemented stone—all enclosed by a fencible dry-built wall and earthen bank, and surrounded by the neat patches of cultivated soil upon which the holy brethren worked. The life of the inmates, too, may be realized with tolerable clearness from a consideration of the well-known characteristics of Celtic missionary monasticism. Most of them would be laymen, exempt from the heavy duties of religious service, and wholly taken up with the practical work and manual labour of the community. The religious brethren, or monks proper, were grouped into three classes—the Seniors, who were old men past active work and rich in holiness; the Working Brethren, on whom the main burden of the missionary and educational work of the monastery was cast; and the Juniors, or novices under instruction. The system of devotional exercises was very severe. A feature was the *Laus Perennis*, or "perpetual praise" maintained in the church day and night by relays of brethren. Thus in the Life of St. Kentigern, we have an account of his monastery at Llanelwy in North Wales, in which it is stated that three hundred and sixty-five monks, "divided into companies, so that the praise of God never ceased," "devoted themselves to the divine office in church by day and by night, and scarcely ever went forth out of the sanctuary"[1]—that is, the *comraich* or sacred precincts of the monastery. The dress of these monks was of the simplest form, consisting of a shirt reaching to the heels, and an upper garment with hood and sleeves; shoes of hide; and a white surplice for use at festivals. All classes lived with the greatest austerity, sleeping on beds of stone, or at the best on boards covered with straw; each monk had his own cell or hut; and celibacy at any rate in the early and best days of Celtic monasticism was strictly enforced. Up in the surrounding hills—in the Correens or in the wilds of the Cabrach—would be the "diserts," or retreats whither the holy brethren would withdraw on occasion for solitary meditation. These hermitages were a great characteristic of the

[1] "Kalendars of Scottish Saints," ed. Bishop Forbes, p. 368.

Celtic monasteries. On the south side of Tap o' Noth, looking towards Clova, is an immense jutting rock called Cloch-Malew, "the stone of Moluag," which no doubt formed the "disert" or retreat of the Saint while labouring in these parts.

In addition to the work connected with the maintenance of the civil and religious life of the monastery, there was also the missionary activity of which each community was a centre. The brethren would go forth, generally in couples, for long periods, sometimes months on end, preaching to the natives and setting before them the ideals and standard of a Christian life. Moreover, every monastery possessed its school, and we also know that they provided systematic teaching in agriculture, and gifted seed to the faithful in the neighbourhood. In the life of St. Nathalan occurs the wise and beautiful remark that "among the works of men's hands the cultivation of the earth approaches nearest to divine contemplation";[1] and this thought was fully translated into practice by the Celtic church. In the East, monasticism abandoned itself to purposeless and selfish introspection: in the West, on the lines established by St. Martin of Tours, and strictly maintained by St. Ninian and his school in Scotland, it became an institution of the highest practical value for the spreading of spiritual and material blessings. It has been well pointed out that whereas the medieval monastery was a refuge whither men fled from the vices of their fellow-men, the monastery in Celtic times was a training school for warriors who boldly issued forth to wrestle with the evil around them.

We know very little of the community at Clova during the six hundred years of its activity. Its founder placed it under the larger settlement which he had planted at Mortlach in Banffshire. Practically the only notice of it which has been preserved amid the darkness of those early ages tells us that the church and lands of Cloveth were confirmed by Malcolm Canmore to the parent monastery at Mortlach. This grant, however, which is dated 1062, "has been," in the words of our great legal antiquary, Cosmo Innes, "very generally denounced as a palpable forgery".[2] After long continuing to fulfil the high purpose of its founder, the little monastery at Clova was finally merged in the Anglo-Norman parochial system which replaced the old Celtic missionary organization in the twelfth century. In 1157 a bull of

[1] "Kalendars of Scottish Saints," p. 417.

[2] "Registrum Episcop. Aberdon.," Vol. I, Preface, p. xi.

Pope Adrian IV assigned the town and monastery of Mortlach, with its five dependent churches and the monastery at Cloveth, to the See of Aberdeen.[1] It has been conjectured that the old Celtic Christianity still retained its hold upon the inhabitants, since we are told by Hector Boece that Gilbert de Sterling, Bishop of Aberdeen from 1228 to 1239, recovered Cloveth from "wicked Highlanders".[2] Thereafter Cloveth became a parish, and the ancient monastery was replaced by the parochial church whose foundations remain, and which in the Roman fashion was dedicated to St. Luke. Luke was probably deliberately chosen by the Romanists from the resemblance of his name to that of Moluag, particularly when the honorific prefix "Mo" is omitted—the form which is Latinized as Luanus or Lugadius. Macfarlane's Topographer, writing in 1725, speaks of a "chapel dedicated to St. Luke called Sommiluak's Chappel, formerly much frequented by all the northern pariochs".[3] His testimony to the fame of the ancient monastery is powerfully reinforced by the fact that the name of its Celtic founder has outlived both the Roman dedication and the faith of Rome itself.

In the fourteenth century, as a result of the disturbances and impoverishment caused by the great struggle with the Plantagenets, it was considered advisable to merge the parish of Clova in Kildrummy. The two parishes, we are told, had been "devastated over and over again by war". Probably the military operations connected with the two sieges of Kildrummy Castle, in 1306 and 1335, had pressed heavily on the district. The union between the two parishes was accordingly carried out on 18 January, 1362, and was duly approved by Alexander, Bishop of Aberdeen, on 4 April, 1364.[4] Thereafter the church of Cloveth fell to ruin, and the ecclesiastical history of this ancient and holy site came to an end.

Although the foundations of the medieval church are wellnigh gone, and nothing whatever remains of the turf and wooden buildings which made up the old Celtic monastery, it is impossible to visit this venerable and historic site without feelings of profound emotion, when we consider the noble work which was here accomplished at the very dawn of our country's recorded annals. No finer task has perhaps been entrusted to man than was given these early missionaries to

[1] "Registrum Episcop. Aberdon.," Vol. I, pp. 5-7.
[2] *Ibid.*, Preface, p. xxiii.
[3] "Macfarlane's Topographical Collections," Vol. I, p. 30.
[4] "Registrum Episcop. Aberdon.," Vol. I, pp. 102-3.

perform. In a wild land, under circumstances of great personal hardship and danger, they lived strenuous lives of the purest self-sacrifice for the great cause to which they were unreservedly consecrated, body and soul. Moreover, theirs were practical lives, rich in well-ordered, fruitful toil, both physical and intellectual. I need not dwell upon the spiritual uplift caused by the adoption of Christianity in Pictland at large, and its political effect in bringing these out-of-the-way districts into eventual touch with the main currents of European development. Not less important was the purely local work which these monkish settlements performed in introducing to the untutored natives an improved husbandry and winning them to a higher standard of social life. It may be freely granted that by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Celtic Christianity had worn itself out, and that its absorption in the Church of Rome was necessary and inevitable, both spiritually and politically. But let us not thereby allow ourselves to forget the great work done by the native church, although all that remains to tell us of her activities are the forgotten sites of her perished monasteries, the church foundations and holy places which mark the wanderings of her great apostles, and the legends which have gathered round their names—legends which, adopted by the medieval church and garbled in her interest, have too often served only to obscure the work of the primitive missionaries.

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THE CATHEDRALS OF MORAY AND CAITHNESS

BY

W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON

(*Reprinted from "The Aberdeen University Review," July*, 1924)

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To The Right Honourable
The Viscountess Cowdray
With the author's compliments
October 8th 1924.

The Cathedrals of Moray and Caithness.

TWO famous Scottish cathedrals, Elgin and Dornoch, celebrate their septcentenary this summer. The coincidence of dates is no chance: that the High Churches of Moray and Caithness should have been founded in the same year is a circumstance of deep significance to the discerning student of the early or formative period in our country's history. How great the issues involved in the foundation of these two northern minsters, how high the purpose enshrined, are matters not readily comprehended by those who are content to regard a cathedral church as the unmeaning relic of a rejected hierarchy.

About Elgin, most glorious of all our Scottish cathedrals, so much has already been written in tribute to its majesty and fame that one hesitates to add a word more. If a great and stirring history, and material remains that even in their ruins rank among the grandest and loveliest examples of medieval art in Britain—if these things justly confer lustre on an ancient fane, then the High Church of Moray deserves all the homage of reverent affection which Scotsmen of every creed have latterly been only too ready to bestow upon this splendid memorial of their country's past, enshrining in its solemn outlines and its marvels of fretted stonework the noblest aspirations of the Middle Ages.

The Cathedral of Caithness is less well known, yet it also is a building of much historic and ecclesiological interest. It occupies a site which has been consecrated to Christian worship for some fourteen centuries, and is associated with the labours of one of the most famous among the apostles of our early Celtic Church. The cathedral still remaining was founded by a great churchman of the Middle Ages, the last Scot to be enrolled in the Kalendar of Saints, a man who—as a modern writer has said—"in the strong combination of soldier, statesman, and Christian is not unworthy of comparison with the great men

of Scottish history."[1] His church, despite all the vicissitudes of an unusually turbulent history, and despite the shocking treatment which it suffered in the so-called "restoration" of 1835, must still be accounted a noble monument of medieval architecture. It is hallowed by the grave of its illustrious and saintly founder, although all that was mortal of St. Gilbert was scattered to the winds by the brutal fury of an iconoclast in 1570. It still contains the tomb of his brother, Sir Richard de Moravia, who died in battle against the Viking invaders at Embo in 1245, and whose sculptured effigy is a rare though mutilated fragment of the sepulchral art of the thirteenth century. Within the walls of the church, also, sleep many generations of the noble House of Sutherland, from William the first Earl, who died in 1248, down to the present time. And lastly, repaired and patched up as it has been, it is still in use, after seven centuries of storm and stress, as a place of worship, carrying on the good work of St. Finbar and St. Gilbert and the holy men of old who in those rough times made Dornoch a centre of light and learning amid the wild and darksome north.

Concerning the early Christian history of Elgin we possess no reliable record; although the shaft of a carved cross, now preserved at the cathedral, and assignable to the ninth century, is sufficient evidence that the place must have received the True Faith from some forgotten saint of the Celtic Church long ere it became the cathedral centre of a Roman see.

About Dornoch no such uncertainty exists. The origins of Christianity here are traceable to the labours of a great Celtic missionary, St. Finbar or Finnian—the "fair-crowned," men called him from his beautiful golden hair. He was a Pict of Irish blood, and was born in the closing years of the fifth century. His life, therefore, was lived amid that stupendous epoch which saw the downfall of the mighty Roman Empire and the travail of a new world yet unborn. Finbar received his early education at St. Ninian's Monastery of *Candida Casa*—Whithorn, the first Christian church in Scotland—and stayed on to become a master in the college where he had been a pupil. After twenty years he returned to Ireland, where he founded, in or about 540, the great monastery of Moville in Ulster, of which he was the first Abbot. But the call of the missionary lay strong upon his

[1] H. F. Campbell, "The Cathedral of Caithness at Dornoch," *Trans. Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society*, 1891, p. 34.

soul, and after a time he crossed over again to Scotland, where he laboured for many years with great success, founding Christian centres at Kilwinning (*Kil-Phinian*) in Ayrshire, at Geanies in Easter Ross, at Berriedale in Caithness, and (before 560) at Dornoch. All this work, it should be noted, was done quite independently of St. Columba, who was in fact a pupil of St. Finbar at Moville. St. Finbar is one of that numerous body of devoted apostles belonging to St. Ninian's British Church of Strathclyde, the labours of whom in after ages have been obscured by the superior renown of the Scotic church and its founder, St. Columba. Only gradually is modern scholarship restoring these pre-Columban saints of the Ninianic church to their rightful place in the grand story of the evangelization of Scotland.

In the evening of his days St. Finbar retired to rest at his own abbey of Moville, where he died at a ripe old age on 10 September, 578. Little is known of his personality, but we read that he was a great lover of good books, that he brought to Moville from *Candida Casa* the first complete copy of the Gospels and the Mosaic Law known in Ireland, and that he made his own illuminated manuscripts of the Gospels and the Psalter. Readers who are familiar with St. Columba's life will recall how it was his pious theft of St. Finbar's Gospel for the purpose of making a copy that led to the battle of Cul Dreimhne and Columba's exile to Iona, and all that would follow.[1]

Scanty information is available about the Christian community established by St. Finbar at Dornoch, but we may guess that it suffered sorely and repeatedly amid the great storm of the Viking invasions that burst over northern Pictland from the eighth to the eleventh century—four hundred years of horror and confusion such as few countries have lived through, years when a new and terrible petition was added to the Church's litany: "*A furore Normannorum libera nos Domine*," "From the fury of the Norsemen deliver us, Good Lord!" Through all the wreck and ruin, however, the little monastery continued to maintain its existence; and, amid all the shiftings of population in those tortured ages, the memory of its founder, St. Finbar, remained so vivid in the countryside around, that when Bishop Gilbert

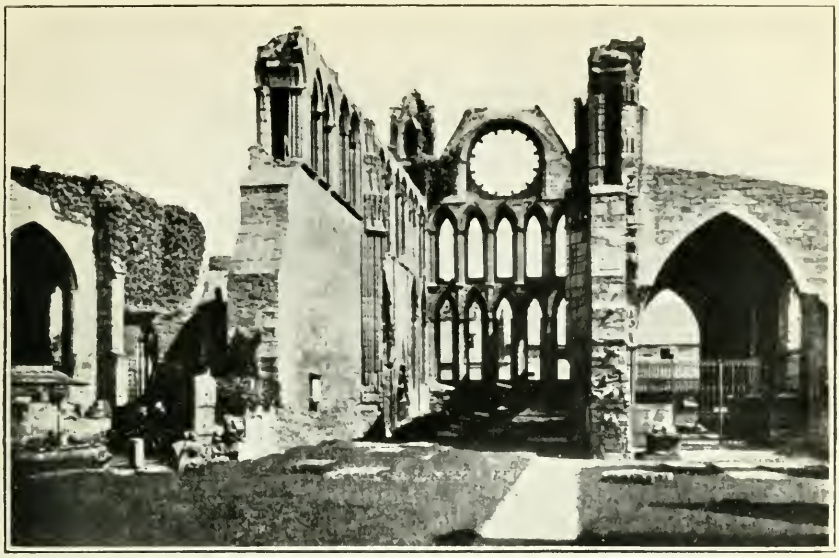
[1] For St. Finbar of Dornoch see A. B. Scott, "The Pictish Nation, its People and its Church," pp. 4, 18-19, 28, 31, 39, 57-58, 84, 92, 97-98, 105, 118, 119, 129-132, 138, 155, 234, 243, 269, 279, 289, 340-341, 355; also the same author's "St. Ninian, Apostle of the Britons and Picts," pp. xi., xiii., 87, 92, 100, 101, 102, 105, 116-123.

erected his Cathedral here in the thirteenth century, his new dedication to St. Mary found slender favour; and St. Finbar continued to be held in extreme veneration down to and even beyond the catastrophe of the ancient faith. A gleam of light is shed upon the condition of the little monastery in the twelfth century by a letter which has been preserved, written about 1140 by David I. to the Norse Earls of Caithness and Orkney, praying that they will protect the monks of Dornoch from injury and shame.[1] In the next century St. Finbar's community appears as a college of Culdees. As such it was suppressed by the Romanising policy of St. Gilbert, who transformed the Culdees into Trinitarian Friars.

To understand the circumstances which led in the thirteenth century to the erection of cathedral churches in the Roman obedience at Elgin and Dornoch, we must diverge for a little into the general history of Scotland. And first of all let us remember that in those days Scotland as we know it now scarcely existed. In no sense of the word was there then a Scottish nation. Instead we see a group of vast provinces, centres of an older particularist life, maintaining themselves in resolute hostility to the unifying coercion of the Scottish Crown. Between the Spey and the Firth of Dornoch was the great province of Moravia, cherishing the memories of its Pictish independence, and under its rulers of the line of Macbeth nursing an undying grudge against the Normanising kings of the rival house of Canmore. Here, therefore, racial antipathy and a dynastic quarrel went hand in hand in unrelenting opposition to the Scottish Crown. North of Moravia, again, was the great province of Cat, including modern Caithness and Sutherland, half Norse in its population, ruled by a Norse Jarl bitterly hostile alike to the Scottish king and to his neighbour, the ruler of Moravia, on the south.

In their endeavour to extend the central control over these outlying districts, the Scottish kings made use of two instruments, Norman feudalism and the Roman Church, each of which in its own sphere connoted a higher form of political organism than Scotland had known since the Roman legions withdrew from her borders. Seeking to impose this unifying discipline, the kings of Canmore's line collided in the first place with the resolute Pictish particularism of Moravia, which under the house of Macbeth remained obstinately disaffected throughout

[1] *Registrum de Dunfermelyn* (Bannatyne Club), No. 23, p. 14.



ELGIN

From a photograph by the late Mr. G. W. Wilson

DORNOCH

From a photograph by the late Mr. W. G. Jamieson

[*To face page* 208]

the twelfth century. In dealing with Moravia the Scottish kings drew assistance from the Norse occupation of Cat, which menaced Moravia in the rear. The Crown was thus enabled to consolidate its own power undisturbed in the south, and ultimately to overthrow Moravia itself. By the reign of Alexander II., Moravia had thus been conquered and settled by loyal Anglo-Norman barons. Thereafter the same process was applied to the old Norse Jarldom of Cat. Broken up into the feudal Earldoms of Caithness and Sutherland, its lands were parcelled out among *mesne* tenants holding their fiefs by military service due to the Crown. Parallel with this process went the ecclesiastical organization of the territory beyond the Spey into parishes grouped into dioceses. By about the year 1240, with the establishment of the great Normanized family of De Moravia alike in the earldoms and the bishoprics of Moray and Caithness, the transformation was complete, and the control of the Crown, acting through the great feudatories, was exercised without let or hindrance as far as the Pentland Firth.[1]

So big a revolution was not achieved without the most strenuous opposition from those who yearned to live in the fashion of their forebears ; nor can we withhold our meed of sympathy from the northern Celts who regarded the new feudalism as tyranny, and the new Roman Church as an alien hierarchy seeking to blot out the memory of those great saints of the early Pictish Church, the fragrance of whose good deeds still lingered around many a venerated chapel or wonder-working well. How bitter was the resistance offered to the new Church is strikingly revealed in the history of the see of Caithness. Including in its jurisdiction all Scotland north of the Dornoch Firth, this diocese was founded by David I., though how far its organization took effective shape in his reign we cannot tell. Its seat originally was at Halkirk (already the site of a Celtic church established by St. Drostan), some five miles inland from Thurso, and therefore in the heart of the wild Scandinavian portion of the diocese. The unwisdom of this choice was soon to be terribly evidenced. The intrusion of the bishopric was keenly resented by the people, who were warmly attached to their old Celtic Church, and deeply suspected a form of hierarchic government that went hand in hand with the new Anglo-Norman tyranny. John, the second bishop, added fuel to the fire by attempting to levy Peter's pence, and, moreover, succeeded in making himself

[1] See my "The Castle of Kildrummy, its Place in Scottish History and Architecture," pp. viii-ix, 23-51.

personally detested by the powerful Scoto-Norse Earl of Orkney, Jarl Harold Maddadsson. Accordingly, that worthy and his followers, in 1201, surprised the bishop in his palace at Scrabster, near Thurso, blinded him, and cut out his tongue. The mutilated bishop was succeeded by Adam, Abbot of Melrose, who must have ill-liked exchanging that beautiful and wealthy monastery for the bleak solitudes of Caithness. At any rate, he seemed to have been an inveterate absentee, and concerned himself with his bishopric only in so far as it supplied a fruitful source of revenue. Maddened by his exactions, the people, instigated by their ruthless lord, Jarl John Haraldsson, surprised the bishop at Halkirk and roasted him to death on his own kitchen fire (11 September, 1222).

> "In thar fellony and thar ire
> Thar thai brynt hym in a fyre,"[1]

says Wyntoun tersely.

News of this ghastly recrudescence of the Viking spirit brought King Alexander II. in person hot-foot on the scene with a powerful army, and the atrocious deed was fully avenged. According to the Norse authorities, the fearful punishment which the enraged King meted out to the people of Caithness must have been remembered in the country as Bruce's "herschip" of Buchan was remembered in Aberdeenshire a century later. But despite these horrible doings, the sequel shows that the King and his churchmen had learned their lesson. If the new ecclesiastical system was to become operative in these parts, it must begin by earning the respect of the people. Respect would not be forthcoming under a prelate such as Bishop Adam. The new policy was revealed in the choice of his successor. In the murdered bishop's place was appointed Gilbert de Moravia, Archdeacon of Moray, one of the greatest ecclesiastics and men of affairs of his day, and one of the wisest and noblest men that the medieval church produced in Scotland. "To give significance to the election," writes Dr. Joseph Robertson, "it was made in the presence of the King of Scots and the captains of his host; and the priest on whom the choice fell was a kinsman of the great chiefs who had then recently acquired that vast territory—the 'Southern Land' of Caithness—which now gives the title of Duke to their lineal descendant. With such support from

[1] Andrew of Wyntoun's "Original Chronicle," ed. F. J. Amours, Vol. V., pp. 84-85.

the arm of flesh, Bishop Gilbert ruled his church in peace for more than twenty years." [1]

In addition to his spiritual charge, the new bishop was given full political authority north of the Mounth, so that he had to deal with turbulent Moravia as well as with his own wild northern see. It was in this connection that he built the great Castle of Kildrummy in Aberdeenshire, on a strong position commanding the trunk route northward from the Castle of Brechin over the Mounth into the disaffected region beyond the Spey. Of Bishop Gilbert's great work in pacifying the whole of this district, and bringing it at last into the obedience of the Crown, I have written elsewhere.[2] Here we are concerned only with his reorganization of the diocese of Caithness.

By a fortunate chance the original charter constituting Bishop Gilbert's chapter has been preserved among the muniments of Dunrobin Castle. It shows how the new prelate, who as Archdeacon of Moray had been closely identified with the organization of the chapter at Elgin, followed his colleagues across the Firth in modelling his new establishment upon the English see of Lincoln. His cathedral would be a collegiate church served by ten canons, five of whom (in addition to the Bishop) were dignified, namely, the Dean, the Precentor, the Chancellor, the Treasurer, and the Archdeacon. In the chapter the bishop sat as a simple canon. All the canons were bound to reside at least three months within the new cathedral city at Dornoch, and the Dean at least twice that length of time. Coincidently with the organization of the chapter the whole diocese was divided into twenty parishes, a proportion of whose endowments was impropriated to the cathedral. The prebends of fourteen parishes were thus assigned to the canons; the remaining six parishes were reserved for the bishop himself. All the canons were bound personally or by vicars to daily ministration in the cathedral church, and special revenues were earmarked for the upkeep of the fabric and the provision of light and incense. "Upon those who shall destroy and injure it," so run the solemn words with which the Deed of Foundation closes, "may the wrath and indignation of Almighty God rest in everlasting torment." How terribly St. Gilbert's curse was fulfilled the sequel will reveal.[3]

[1] "Scottish Abbeys and Cathedrals" (reprinted 1891, from *Quarterly Review*, June, 1849), p. 48.

[2] "The Castle of Kildrummy," pp. 3, 43-51.

[3] Original Deed in Sir William Fraser, "Sutherland Book," Vol. III., pp. 3-7.

Having thus established his chapter and organized the diocese, St. Gilbert's next task was to provide a High Church worthy of his new foundation. For this purpose he took the significant step of transferring the cathedral seat from the dangerous and ill-omened Norse centre of Halkirk to Dornoch—a place which, alreading possessing popular sanctity through St. Finbar's monastery, had the additional advantage of being more in touch with civilising influences. Architectural evidence shows that the work of building must have commenced very soon after the constitution of the chapter in 1224. In its complete state the cathedral church comprised an aisled nave, transepts, choir, and a central tower. The whole measures 123 feet in length and a little under 90 feet across the transepts. The aisles have been removed and the remainder of the church was largely rebuilt in the "restoration" of 1835-37; but the massive central tower still exists, supported on its noble clustered piers and richly moulded pointed arches, all in the transitional style between Romanesque and Gothic which prevailed in these parts during the early years of the thirteenth century. Bishop Gilbert would naturally take a close personal interest in its erection, and Sir Robert Gordon tells us how "all the glasse that served this church when it wes built, wes maid by Sainct Gilbert his appoyntment besyd Sidderay [Sidera] tuo myles by west Dornogh."[1] The new cathedral was dedicated to the Conception of our Blessed Lady, but after-generations preferred to know it as St. Gilbert's church. Its saintly founder, loved and venerated by the populace who had so savagely handled his predecessors, died in extreme old age in his palace of Scrabster on 1 April, 1245.

Amid all the mists of thaumaturgic legend with which the pious affection of later ages enwreathed his memory, there shines forth the living picture of a great Christian, a great prelate, and a great statesman, strong of faith and high in courage, gifted with indomitable purpose, and supereminent in tact. Let us but envisage the sheer physical courage and the stern sense of duty that must have sustained him when, already advanced in years, he took up office in the wild northern diocese where two predecessors had so tragically failed; let us imagine the high qualities of organizing genius, administrative capacity, and unremitting patience, which were requisite to conceive and to carry out the idea of a completely constituted diocese, after the pattern of a great

[1] "Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland," pp. 6, 31.

English see, in these barbaric parts; and, above all, let us remember the shining moral powers, the spiritual authority, the gifts of tact and conciliation, which were needed to win the fierce half-Viking population first to passive obedience and then to a warm acceptance of the new order. Viewed merely in its political aspect, the work of St. Gilbert was of lasting importance in the creation of our Scottish nationality, and he deserves an honourable place upon its roll of fame.

Let us now cross the narrow waters and see what was doing, during those eventful years, in the diocese of Moray. Here, if the story is less spectacular, it illustrates the same processes more deliberately at work in a district earlier brought under the influence of the new order.

I have already said that the province of Moravia was a thorn in the side of the Scottish kings throughout the twelfth century. David I., Malcolm the Maiden, and William the Lyon had all campaigned incessantly beyond the Spey, and the first of these kings had introduced the practice of expropriating the old Celtic lords, and conferring their lands upon settlers of Teutonic blood. We have an instance of this policy in the case of Berowald the Fleming, ancestor of the family of Innes, to whom King Malcolm granted the lands of Innes and Easter Urquhart for the service of one soldier in the royal castle of Elgin, by a charter dated at Perth on Christmas Day, 1160.[1]

Hand in hand with this process of infeudation went the establishment of the Roman Church. The bishopric of Moray was founded by Alexander I. (1107-24). Its cathedral centre was at first at Birnie—where a fine Norman parish church still marks the old importance of the place—and after 1207 at Spynie,[2] where the episcopal palace later stood, and stands. Hard on the heels of the secular clergy followed, as always, the regulars. In 1125 David I. founded the small Priory of Urquhart, colonized with Benedictine monks from Canterbury. King David also founded, in 1150, the great Cistercian Abbey of Kinloss. But despite the vigorous suppression of repeated revolts, the settlement of feudal landlords and their followers, and the founding of religious establishments as centres of civilization and proselytizing agencies in favour of the new order, under Alexander II. the men of Moray rose

[1] "An Account of the Familie of Innes," compiled by Duncan Forbes of Culloden, 1698, ed. C. Innes, pp. 51-2.

[2] *Bulla papalis de sede cathedrali statuenda apud ecclesiam Sancte Trinitatis de Spyny* —"*Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis*" (Bannatyne Club), No. 45, pp. 39-40.

in two last desperate efforts (1215 and 1228) to vindicate their ancient dynasty and independence. These outbreaks were quelled with a speed and precision which prove that the measures already taken to control the district had not been without effect. At all events, under Alexander II. the absorption of Moravia into the body politic of Scotland was finally carried out. After his death we hear no more of trouble from this quarter. On the contrary, during the great struggle with the Plantagenets no more consistent support to the national leaders against the tyranny of Edward I. and Edward III. was offered than by the men of Moray under their gallant lords.

The largest detail in the reorganization of Moray was, of course, the establishing of the diocese upon a permanent footing. In 1223, Bishop Andrew de Moravia, a cousin of Gilbert of Caithness, transferred the High Church of his see from Spynie to Elgin. Here the erection of the great cathedral was begun, St. Gilbert performing the act of consecration on 19 July, 1224. The site was granted by Alexander II., who took a warm personal interest in the erection of the cathedral, and was frequently in Elgin and its neighbourhood during this period.[1] The earliest work still remaining, in the south transept of the cathedral, must have been erected at this time, and the great western towers are very little later. Building, interrupted by a conflagration in 1270,[2] and by the long wars with England, continued all through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In 1390, on the occasion of its savage destruction by the Wolf of Badenoch, the peerless fabric was described as "the special pride of the land, the glory of the realm, the delight of strangers and wayfarers, a praise and a boast among foreign nations, lofty in its towers without, splendid in its appointments within, its countless jewels and rich vestments, and the multitude of its priests serving God in righteousness."[3] Well and truly was the stately fane called the "Lanthorn of the North," when we consider, in addition to its spiritual mission, the political circumstances under which the great

[1] "*Registrum Moraviense*," Nos. 26 (p. 19), 57, 58 (pp. 63-65): "*preceptum Regis de translatione sedis episcopatus ad Elgin; commissio papalis de mutatione sedis ad ecclesiam Sancte Trinitatis juxta Elgin; statutum commissariorum papalium de eadem.*"

[2] "*Eodem anno combusta est ecclesia de Elgyn et aedificia canonicorum.*"—"*Joannis Forduni Scotichronicon*," ed. W. Goodall, Vol. II., p. 112.

[3] "*Ecclesia mea que fuit speciale patrie decus, regni gloria et delectatio extraneorum et supervenientium hospitum, laus et exaltatio laudis in regnis extraneis, in multitudine servientium et ornatu pulcherrimo, et in qua ut creditur Deus recte colebatur, ut de altis ipsius campanilibus et de venustissimo ipsius apparatu intrinseco et jocalibus ipsius innumeris taceam.*"—"*Registrum Moraviense*," No. 173, pp. 204-5.

cathedral was founded, and the effect it had in consolidating the power of the Anglo-Norman polity and spreading the blessings of a settled government and material civilization in a remote and lawless district.

About the same period the Valliscaulian Priory of Pluscarden was founded, six miles to the south-west of Elgin. Its charter was granted by Alexander II. in 1236. Another Valliscaulian Priory was established by Sir John Bisset of Lovat in 1232 at Beauly.[1] Secular and regular clergy were followed in course by the mendicant orders, of which Alexander II. established Dominican convents at Elgin and Inverness in 1233. On the other side of the Firth, the ancient Celtic monastery at Edderton, in Tarbat, a foundation of St. Ninian's, was transferred to Fearn, south of Tain, and there (1238) re-established on Roman lines. To retain a link with the past, and in order to ingratiate the new system with the people, an abbot was fetched from Whithorn, St. Ninian's *Candida Casa*, now a flourishing Priory of the Premonstratensian Order.

In Scotland beyond the Spey the progress of the great revolution which we have traced is still clearly marked by the evidence of material remains. Other lowland districts of Scotland are studded with Norman parish churches, which mark the introduction of the medieval hierarchy and the extension of the parochial system during the twelfth century. But only one church of this period, St. Brandon's at Birnie, exists in Moray. The little chapel of St. Mary, at Orton, once greatly celebrated for its healing powers, was also a Norman building.[2] On the other hand, the architecture of the thirteenth century, after the country had settled down, is represented by the magnificent ruins of Elgin Cathedral, Kinloss Abbey, and Pluscarden Priory, and by the humbler remains of parochial churches at Altyre and Barevan. Equally significant is the state of affairs to the northward of the Great Glen. Here no example of the Norman style is known to have existed; and the church buildings dating back beyond the thirteenth century are all featureless little chapels which, so far as they have any affinities, resemble the ancient Celtic style. In the thirteenth century, however, the introduction of the medieval polity is marked by a comparative wealth of buildings in the First Pointed style. Thus we have the Cathedral of Caithness at Dornoch, and that of Ross at Fortrose—whither it was

[1] The *third* Valliscaulian house in Scotland was Ardchattan Priory, Argyllshire, founded by Duncan Macdougal of Lorn in 1231.

[2] See J. Longmuir, "Speyside," p. 34.

transferred, about 1235, from St. Moluag's ancient foundation at Rosemarkie. To the same period belong the older church of St. Dubthac at Tain, and a number of small parish churches scattered over the country, such as St. Peter's at Thurso (a foundation of St. Gilbert's); St. Mary's at Lybster; St. Drostan's, at Canisbay; and the Church of Dunnet.

The diocesan establishment of Moray, like that of Caithness, was modelled on the English see of Lincoln. Already in the time of Bishop Brice (1203-22), when the High Church still stood at Spynie, a chapter of eight secular cannons on the pattern of Lincoln had been formed. Under Bishop Andrew de Moravia the number of prebends rose to twenty-three, the Bishop holding one, and sitting, like his colleague across the Firth, as a simple canon in the chapter. The dignified clergy consisted of the Dean, Precentor, Treasurer, Chancellor, Archdeacon, Subdean, and Succentor. The Chancellor, Treasurer, Archdeacon, Subdean, Succentor, and other two canons were bound to maintain priests for their cathedral duties, the remaining canons having in some cases to maintain deacons and in other cases subdeacons. The bishop had twelve mensal churches assigned to him, and there were originally nine common churches of the chapter.[1] The diocese was of vast extent, stretching from the Spey to the confines of Ross in the north and Lochaber in the west, and extending southward to include Strathbogie in Aberdeenshire.

In its final form, as rebuilt after the Wolf of Badenoch's raid in 1390, the High Church of Moray was a noble fane, with its grand western façade, 85 feet in breadth, consisting of two lofty towers with a splendid porch and window between; its nave of seven bays, with the notable peculiarity of double aisles on either side, a feature paralleled in Britain only by the Cathedral of Chichester; its transepts, with a span of 116 feet; its aisled choir; its glorious chapter-house; its presbytery, with the solemn eastern gable; and soaring over all, the central tower, 198 feet in height. The total internal length of this great church was

[1] "*Registrum Moraviense*," Nos. 46 (pp. 40-43), 81 (pp. 90-94):—*magna carta Bricii de fundatione canonicorum apud Spyni; constitutio Andree episcopi.* In 1235, Bishop Andrew subscribes a deed as a canon: "*ego Andreas canonicus et episcopus subscribo*"—"*Registrum Prioratus Sancti Andree*" (Bannatyne Club), p. 327. To ascertain the diocesan constitution of Lincoln, the Dean and Chancellor of Moray paid a visit to that Cathedral, and the documents supplied to them by the chapter there, and engrossed in the *Registrum Moraviense* (Nos. 48, 49, pp. 44-58), are the earliest statement in existence of the constitution of the great English Cathedral.

about 264 feet. Much of the nave, the upper part of the west front, and the chapter house were practically rebuilt during the fifteenth century, after the destruction by the Wolf of Badenoch.

We like to picture these two fair cathedrals in all their glory, and would gladly shun the melancholy narration of their overthrow and decay. But the pitiful story must be shortly told. In neither case were John Knox and his turbulent disciples directly responsible. The Reformation passed quietly over Dornoch, as the neighbouring landowners, Catholic equally with Protestant, had already secured a lien on the church lands. Ruin came to St. Gilbert's cathedral not in the wake of bigotry but in a sordid clan contest. A bitter feud divided the Earls of Sutherland and Caithness, and naturally the townsfolk of Dornoch supported the former. The Earl of Caithness called in to his aid the fierce Mackays of Strathnaver; and in 1570 the Master of Caithness and his wild allies together descended on the town. Burghal patriotism in Scotland has always been of a sturdy fashion, and in their desperate peril the townsfolk of Dornoch turned out to battle for their hearths and homes. The town was subjected to a regular siege; but, at last, under cover of night, the assailants fought their way in and committed it to the flames. The cathedral was wholly burned except the steeple, into which a handful of burghers flung themselves and held out for a whole week in the face of repeated assaults, while another party defended themselves with equal gallantry in the episcopal palace. Ultimately the defenders capitulated on terms, yielding three hostages to their fierce enemies, by whom they were afterwards ruthlessly beheaded.[1]

We would fain believe that the destruction of the cathedral was an accident of the general conflagration. We cannot plead this excuse in regard to the desecration of St. Gilbert's tomb. Sir Robert Gordon tells us how, after the taking of the church, William Sutherland of Evelix tore open the grave, kicked a hole in the coffin, and scattered the sainted bones to the wind; "which enormities," adds the historian, "the almightie God did most justlie punish; for that same foot that burst St. Gilbert his coffin, did afterward rot away and consume, to the great terror of all the beholders, whereby this William Southerland grew so lothsum that no man wes able to come neir vnto him, and so he died miserablie." Still more terrible was the fate of the Master of Caithness, whom his own father, after confining him for seven long years in the

[1] "History of the Earldom of Sutherland," pp. 156-7.

dungeon of Girnigoe Castle, deliberately starved to death. Mackay of Strathnaver, according to Sir Robert, died of remorse.[1] Thus the curse of St. Gilbert was brought to pass; and, as Mr. H. M. Mackay has pointed out, all the families who participated in the sacrilege, "have been cut off, root and branch, in Sutherland and Caithness, and not one of them now owns an acre within the wide bounds of St. Gilbert's ancient diocese." [2]

After this catastrophe the cathedral lay in ruins for many years. Further damage was done to its remains by a great storm in the year 1605, concerning which Sir Robert Gordon has an impressive story to tell.

"The fyfth day of November, 1605 yeirs, the detestable powder treasone of the Romane Catholicks of England wes miraculouslie discovered at London; a monstrous and divillish plot, singular from all example, invented and devysed by the Jesuits and ther associats, against the king, quein, prince, and the whole state of Great Britane, for restoring of the Romane religion within this ile, by blowing vp, with gunpowder, the whole body of the commonwealth sitting in parlament; which abhominable fact I forbear to relate at large, being so excellentlie weill set doun by many good writers. The same verie night that this execrable plott should have been put in execution, all the inner stone pillers of the north syd of the body of the cathedrall church at Dornogh (laiking the rooff befor) were blowen from the verie roots and foundations, quyt and clein over the outer walls of the church; which walles did remane nevertheles standing, to the great astonishment of all such as hath sein the same. These great winds did evin then prognosticat and foreshew some great treasone to be at hand; and as the divell wes busie then to trouble the ayre, so wes he bussie, by these his fyrebrands, to truble the estate of Great Britane." [3]

Between 1614 and 1634, under the Caroline episcopacy, the cathedral was partly repaired, the choir and transepts being re-roofed, while the ruined nave, as at Iona about the same time, was partitioned off and abandoned to decay.[4] Thereafter makeshift patching was the rule until 1835-37, when the cathedral received a drastic "restoration"

[1] "History of the Earldom of Sutherland," pp. 157, 158, 163-4.

[2] "Old Dornoch, its Traditions and Legends," p. 13.

[3] "History of the Earldom of Sutherland," p. 255.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 309-310, 346; Sir W. Fraser, "The Sutherland Book," Vol. I., pp. 222-3; Vol. II., pp. 16, 339.

according to the ideas of the time. The nave was rebuilt without aisles, the remains of which were complacently swept away. The other portions of the church were thoroughly repaired, and the whole brought to a smug uniformity by a liberal application of tame ashlar, harling, plaster-work, and yellow-wash. Using the language of studied moderation, the result can only be described as a colossal monument of misdirected zeal. It is some consolation to know that in connection with the forthcoming celebrations an effort has been made to clear the interior of the worst excrescences of nineteenth century "Gothic."[1]

More fortunate than its sister edifice across the water, Elgin Cathedral has merely been ruined; it has been spared the horrors of the Victorian "restorer." The sad tale of its decline and fall has often been told. Squalid parsimony stripped the lead from its roof, the iconoclast vented his destroying zeal upon its splendid furnishings; yet mere neglect, rather than utilitarianism or sacrilege, was responsible for its final downfall. That came on Easter Sunday, 1711, when the great central tower crushed the north transept and the nave beneath its falling mass.[2] To a generation which has outlived alike the Calvinistic hatred of beauty in the House of God, and the pseudo-medievalism of the Romantic Revival, has been left the noble duty of maintaining the finest of our Scottish minsters with loving care in all the austere reality of desolation.

[1] See *Northern Times*, March 20, 1924.

[2] L. Shaw, "History of the Province of Moray," 1775, p. 280.

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